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ABSTRACT

Objectives of this paper were to define the concept of programing, to discuss programing in a complex adult education organization, and to point out aspects of programing of a sociological nature. Programing is a decision-making process. In a complex adult education organization, the process can be divided into eight phases: formulating the program framework; adapting this framework to the various levels of organization; organizing human resources at the operational level needed to plan a program; decision-making at the operational level; the planned program prospectus; the plan of work; implementing the plan; and program accomplishments. Inherent in the process are a number of interrelated steps which suggest tasks to be performed by individual(s) or groups. Performance of these tasks may be influenced by individual characteristics and behavior, interaction within a group, and the homogeneity or heterogeneity of the group. The clarity with which the general social system is understood by those within the system has considerable bearing on the nature of program decisions made. (author/eb)

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A CONCEPTUAL SCHEMA OF THE PROGRAMMING PROCESS IN THE COMPLEX ADULT EDUCATION ORGANIZATION WITH SPECIAL EMPHASIS ON ITS SOCIOLOGICAL ASPECTS

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Three objectives for this paper are:

1. To develop a conceptual definition of programming;
2. To develop a conceptual schema of the programming process in the complex adult education organization; and
3. To identify and describe those aspects of the programming process that are of a sociological nature.

Programming Defined

Any discussion of programming should begin with a consideration of the concept. The literature on the programming concept tends to equate it with the decision-making concept. Although most authorities equate the two concepts in terms of meaning, there appears to be several schools of thought as to what is encompassed in the two parallel concepts.

Webster's Dictionary (1) defines a decision as a "setting or terminating, as of a controversy, by giving judgment on the matter; also a conclusion arrived at after consideration." This definition implies a process when it speaks of "a conclusion arrived at after consideration." A study of what is meant by the term "process" reveals that most authorities view it as being inclusive of a series of interrelated and sequential steps conducing to an end.

The steps involved in arriving at a decision have been described by many students with varying emphases and conceptualizations. According to Porter (2) the process frequently involves the collection and evaluation of basic facts -- based on research, empirical observations, etc.; identification of problems or opportunities;

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consideration of alternative decisions or solutions to problems; resources available for solutions; and the selection of one or more solutions.

Although this concept of the process is adhered to by most writers on the subject, distinctions are often made between decision-making on an individual basis and that occurring as a group phenomenon. Some academicians have emphasized the psychological aspects; while others have focused on the sociological. In reality, programming or decision-making by an individual or a group has psychological, sociological and situational aspects.

From a generic point of view, programming or decision-making implies a rational and purposive process. Alexander (3) cites an hypothesis by Edward H. Litchfield that refers to the steps in the decision-making process when viewed in rational terms as opposed to the irrational and random approach. By so doing, Litchfield suggests that decision-making is not always a rational process, although most people tend to view it as such. Litchfield's hypothesis follows:

> "Decision-making may be rational, deliberative, discretionary, purposive or it may be irrational, habitual, obligatory, and random or any combination thereof. In its rational, deliberative, discretionary and purposive form, it is formed by means of the following sub-activities:
>
> (a) definition of the issue,
>
> (b) analysis of the existing situation,
>
> (c) calculation and delineation of alternatives,
>
> (d) deliberation,
>
> (e) choice."

In his discussion, Litchfield recognizes the possibility that estimates of the situation and the consequences of courses of action must sometimes be substituted for objective information. To the extent that programming or decision-making is essentially rational, the process as Alexander (4) points out -- approximates the scientific approach to problem solving.

Boyd (5) lends credence to Litchfield's proposition concerning the irrationality of the process when he suggests that the introduction of human judgment in the appraisal of facts and alternatives may detract from the rationality of decisions taken. According to Boyd, facts do not reside in the individual, rather it is the individual's perception of facts that determines his behavior and, consequently decisions taken.

Reference has already been made to the distinction between viewing programming or decision-making as a process involving

individuals and one involving a social group, whether small or large. Studies of decision-making (6) by the individual are illustrative of the more or less individualized approach to the programming or decision-making concept. Although these studies recognize the role of the group in influencing certain decisions, their main focus is on the decisions within an individual context.

Since the emphasis of this paper is on the programming or decision-making process as it pertains to groups, it may be of interest to contrast the two different approaches. Larson (7) has compared them in rather meaningful fashion, pointing out similarities as well as dissimilarities.

(1) All decisions are made by individuals; therefore, the psychological processes involved are presumably similar; and

(2) The decisions are influenced by groups.

Decision-making in the two situations is dissimilar in at least three ways:

(1) The situation differs in the number of actors involved directly in the decision within the relevant social system.

(2) The situations differ in the degree of differentation of roles and statuses of the actors.

(3) The situations differ in the pattern of interrelationships of the social systems involved.

It is apparent from this discussion, that the definition of the programming or decision-making process is fairly uniform in terms of postualting the steps involved. Again, this is based on the assumption of a rational orientation to problem-solving.

The Scope Of This Paper

It has been rather clearly established that programming or decision-making is generally viewed as a rational and purposive process conducing to a conclusion. This definition, from a generic point of view, is equally as applicable to the individual(s) as it would be to social groups, whether small or large.

The ubiquitous nature of programming or decision-making occurring as it does in all phases of human endeavor suggests the need for delimiting the scope of this paper. Too, the difficult task of discussing the sociological aspects of the programming process also suggested the need for developing an appropriate frame of reference. Because of its significant role in Adult Education, the complex Adult Education organization was selected as the context within which to examine the programming or decision-making process.

Institutional organization as treated in this paper refers to a social system with purposive objectives stated in general terms of education. Within this general social system there may be, and often are, a number of subsystems whose objectives and roles are interrelated and consistent with those of the general system. Programming (decision-making) occurs at different levels of the organization: at the national level, state level, county level and even the community level. There is a need for coordination of decisions made at different levels. Several authorities in organizational and administrative theory (8) (9) (10) contend that because the objectives of the general social system are the focal points around which decisions should be oriented regardless of the organizational level at which they are made, any analysis of the decision-making process must take into account the total organization.

Considerable support for this premise is reflected in the findings of several recent studies pertaining to the programming process in the complex adult education organization. (11) (12) (13) (14) These tentative findings provide considerable insight into and a useful approach to conceptualizing and understanding the programming process in the complex adult education organization. This approach makes it possible to divide the process into eight major interrelated phases. These can be subdivided into elements. The eight phases include:

(1) formulating the organizational program framework;

(2) adapting the program framework or selected elements contained therein to the various levels of organization;

(3) organizing human resources at the operational level needed to plan an educational program;

(4) planning or decision-making at the operational level;

(5) the planned program prospectus;

(6) the plan of work;

(7) implementing the plan;

(8) program accomplishments.

In a sense this is a model for planning, implementing and evaluating program decisions in an educational task-oriented organization that functions in a voluntary setting. Because of the tentativeness and exploratory nature of research conducted up to this point, these eight phases have been defined for heuristic purposes.

In order to depict the sociological aspects of programming encompassed within this model, it will be necessary to:
(1) identify some of the major variables that are important to

planning, implementing and evaluating program decisions; (2) indicate some of the interrelationships between these variables and (3) glean from these interrelationships some of the apparent sociological implications.

To accomplish these tasks several dependent and independent variables for each phase will be identified. Some discussion will be stated for most of the independent variables primarily in terms of considerations which need to be pointed up in terms of sociological implications. The treatment of the independent variables is meant to be suggestive as opposed to exhaustive in nature.

The consideration noted concerning the independent variables will be drawn in large part from library and field research which has been done in North Carolina, Iowa, Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and New York.

Additionally, the authors' research and experiences in programming will be brought to bear.

PHASE I - FORMULATING THE ORGANIZATIONAL PROGRAM FRAMEWORK

Dependent Variable:

The objective at this phase in the complex Adult Education organization is to have professional educators within the organization understand and agree upon its educational objectives and their role in relationship to each other in implementing them.

Independent Variables:

The degree to which professional educators understand and identify with the objectives of the complex Adult Education organization is related to the following:

(1) The opportunity which is provided the professional staff in helping define and modify the educational objectives for the organization that clearly indicate the behavioral changes sought in various clientele groups.

(2) The opportunity which is provided staff members to contribute to decisions taken with respect to the definition and establishment of program policies and procedures to guide their efforts.

(3) The manner in which the roles of staff members are defined and communicated to all concerned.

(4) The manner in which the expected interrelationships between various staff groups are worked out and these groups know and understand them.

Every organization exists to accomplish certain defined objectives or goals (15). The degree to which an organization attains its objectives is contingent upon its staff's understanding and acceptance of these ends, the organizational policies or guidelines set forth to guide their efforts, and the definition of roles to be performed.

A number of organization theorists (16) (17) (18) contend that an understanding by the staff of these organization fundamentals is paramount if unified action is to be attained. They further support the idea that the objectives of the organization should influence and provide direction for the efforts of each individual staff member regardless of his role or location in the organization. Their argument is that this factor if properly treated does not destroy the staff's initiative, but rather bolsters their morale and, consequently, their productiveness. They advance the hypothesis that all organizations regardless of function, need to establish or define the framework within which staff members are expected to operate.

According to Drucker (19), staff members' understanding and acceptance of the objectives of the organization does not result from edict, but rather through the deliberate and conscious involvement of the staff in their formulation. Campbell (20) states that those persons who have major responsibility for implementing program decisions in the educational organization need to have a voice in making such decisions. As organizations broaden their scope and, hence, enlarge their staffs, the greater is the need to consciously involve representatives of various staff groups in formulating major organization decisions. The roles played by people in any organization are interrelated. That is, the activities of various staff positions and groups must fit and mesh togethrer if maximum results are to be attained in relation to the organization's objectives. The occupants of various positions behave as they do because of: (1) expectations or persons in other related positions; (2) accessibility to resources; and (3) what they themselves perceive their roles to be.

A common problem in most complex adult education organizations is the fact that too little attention has been given to the clear definition of roles within such organizations. According to Dubin (21) this factor has tended to hamper the effectiveness of staff efforts in rleation to the attainment of the broad organizational objectives. As organizations expand their scope and, consequently enlarge their staffs, the roles of staff positions and groups and the interrelationship of these roles in terms of the ends sought by the organization tend to become hazy and incoherent. Staff activities become fragmentary and often individual staff groups because of lack of frequent and continuous interaction with their counter-parts begin to function as autonomous units. The need for planned and deliberate staff involvement and interaction in the continuous definition of their roles as well as those of their colleagues is apparent if the effects of the occupants of individual positions and the

several staff groups are to be effectively focused on the objectives of the organization.

PHASE II - ADAPTING THE PROGRAM FRAMEWORK TO THE SEVERAL ORGANIZATIONAL LEVELS

Dependent Variables:

The purpose of this phase is to effectively link (integrate) the organizational program framework (or elements) with the on-going program at the several levels of the organization.

Independent Variables:

The following variables are important in linking the program framework (or elements contained therein) to the on-going program: (1) the opportunity is provided the professional staff (at the organizational level(s) to be affected) and relevant lay leaders to carefully examine the proposed change, determine its relationship to and possible effects upon the prior program situation and to identify means for initiating change. (2) The actual development of a plan for initiating the change that is acceptable to both the professionals and lay leaders.

Within the general social system (complex adult education organization) are a number of sub-systems. Certain leadership patterns, power relations, roles, expectations and attitudes exist within the smaller systems. Each of the sub-systems, although intimately related to each other and to the larger system has an established pattern of operation. In the complex adult education organization these sub-systems may include specialized staff groups that are housed in close proximity to the central organization and operational (field) units located some distance from the central office. Because of this factor, programming must occur at the various levels of the organization. The real challenge is that of having these sub-systems identify with the general social system, but at the same time permitting them sufficient flexibility to make and implement decisions at their respective levels of operation. Although plans are made and implemented at the several levels of organization. It is extremely important that they be coordinated and effectively related to the overall plans of the general organization.

The test confronting the large complex adult education organization is that of effectively linking direction provided at its apex with the programs of its several sub-systems. Direction provided by the general social system is meaningful only to the extent that the staff groups at the various levels of the organization understand and can adapt it to their specific situations. It is not enough to have the professional leadership understand and accept proposed changes, ultimately, the people who are to be affected by the change also must understand and accept it. (22) The professional and lay leadership must understand the proposed change, its anticipated effects on on-going programs, and accept

it if maximum organizational impact is to be felt at the operational level. Essentially, the proposed direction is never accepted in its totality. Rather, the desirable aspects of the change (as perceived by the adopters) are integrated into or related to their on-going program activities.

PHASE III - ORGANIZING THE HUMAN RESOURCES AT THE OPERATIONAL (FIELD) LEVEL NEEDED TO PLAN AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM THAT IS RELATED TO THE NEEDS OF THE SEVERAL RELEVANT PUBLICS AND THAT IS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE COMPLEX ADULT EDUCATION ORGANIZATION'S OBJECTIVES AND AVAILABLE RESOURCES

Dependent Variable:

In general terms, the aim of this phase is to form and maintain effective organization of lay leadership within the system at the operative (field) level to help plan a program of change.

Independent Variables:

The degree to which the human resources (leaders) within a given social system (area, county, community, etc.) are formed and maintained as an effective decision-making group (that can reflect the needs and interests of the general populace within the system) is associated with the following:

1. The opportunity that is provided for group members to go through a process which leads to group formation in the socio-psychological sense of the word.
2. The personal and social characteristics of persons selected to be a part of the group.
3. The manner in which potential members are committed to participate.
4. The manner in which the expected interrelationship between various planning groups are worked out and persons concerned know and understand them.
5. The degree to which planners are equipped for their responsibilities.

A prerequisite to any type of change program is that of having people recognize that change is desirable. Change can be effected only if people are dissatisfied (intrinsically motivated) with their present status and are motivated to act. The large complex adult education organization with its many sub-systems must have some means of relating its resources to the analyzed and felt needs of people. Such a relationship does not come about merely by edict nor does it occur by working with individuals alone. Rather the large public organization through its knowledge of society and how change occurs must provide the

medium for relevant groups to actively participate in a rational decision-making process culminating in the identification of needs and problems, the development of means for attacking these needs and problems and a commitment from them to act.

Research findings (23) indicate that there is need to form an effective group of lay leaders within the system to plan and in some instances direct a program of change compatible with the needs of people and consistent with the direction advocated by the complex adult education organization.

The effectiveness of such a group(s) is dependent upon their understanding of their objectives, means and authority. In other words, opportunities must be provided for such a group to develop a comprehensive understanding of their objectives, means and authority for accomplishing them.

In terms of accomplishing the group task, there is reason to believe that the personal and social characteristics of individuals are important. That is, given the understanding previously referred to, persons engaged in decision-making should be ones who are capable of seeing the total picture. The objective is to identify these leaders who can reflect the needs of people, but who possess a high degree of objectivity.

In forming any type of group, advanced thought needs to be given to defining its relationship to other groups. Such a definition of relationships must be imparted to the members of the new group. In other words, the structure and functions of every group must be understood in relationship to every other group. Students of bureaucracy will see the potential problem which will arise if details relative to the variable are assumed or ignored.

PHASE IV - PLANNING OF DECISION-MAKING AT THE OPERATIONAL (FIELD) LEVEL

Dependent Variable:

The objective of this phase is to consciously invoke all steps of the decision-making, problem-solving approach so as to arrive at decisions for inclusion in the program prospectus that are based upon the analyzed and felt needs of the people and that are within the context of available organizational resources.

Independent Variables:

The following factors (variables) are important in arriving at good decisions for inclusion in an educational program.

1. Opportunity for the decision-makers to fully understand the decision-making process, and their role in activating the steps contained in the process.

2. Adequacy and relevancy of background information assembled for the group's consideration; the relative effectiveness of approaches employed in analyzing and interpreting the background information; the relevancy of problems or needs identified; and the type of plan developed for attacking problems identified.

3. Opportunity for the intensive and active involvement and interaction of planners in all of the steps in the decision-making process.

One of the most difficult, but important phases is that of making decisions for inclusion in the program. The first and perhaps most important factor to the success of this phase is that of providing opportunity for the planners or decision-makers to acquire an understanding of the decision-making process (24). Such a frame of reference is needed if the planners are to fully utilize the steps contained in the process to arrive at rational decisions.

In addition to understanding the decision-making process, planners and the professional staff must know their roles and relationships to each other in order to function to maximum capacity. Associated with the process are a number of tasks that need to be performed. These should be clearly delineated and assigned either to the planners or professional staff or both. Several experts in administration suggest that decision-makers ought to be formally trained in the steps of decision-making.

The major task associated with this phase (25) is to arrive at sound decisions based upon factual information for inclusion in the program. The determination of these decisions requires information relative to the situation confronting people. Thus the first step leading to a decision is that of assembling complete and pertinent facts about the locale and background information inclusive of its socio-economic growth and trends. The second step is that of analyzing and interpreting the basic data and identifying needs and interests of people. Once identified, these needs and interests describe the gap between existing and desired conditions. These locally identified gaps are problem situations. Having identified problem situations, it then becomes necessary to assign them some priority. The resources which a given locale may commit to the solutions of problem situations are often limited. Also some problems will need more assistance than others. This means that not all problems can be programmed for action. Thus the planners -- based upon their analysis of background information -- must determine which problems will receive immediate attention, how progress toward solution of these may facilitate solutions to other problems and how future evaluations may produce needed adjustments.

The fourth step in decision-making is that of determining objectives (26) based on problems identified and the priority assigned them. Such objectives will be immediate and long-time

in nature and will determine what clientele groups are to be affected, what subject matter will need to be presented, and what changes are to be brought about in the clientele.

The last step is that of exploring alternatives for copying with the problem situations and selecting a course of action. Selection of the most appropriate course of action is a measure of the planners' ability to foresee conditions which may arise to facilitate or block the proposed program, the effects which a given solution may have in terms of creating other problems, and the possible utility which may accrue from one solutuion to the achievement of related goals or objectives.

The extent to which planners arrive at decisions soundly grounded in facts will depend upon the process invoked and the degree of interaction within the group. Though effective interaction is closely related to effective formation and maintenance, there is need to insure participation by the planners.

PHASE V - THE PLANNED PROGRAM PROSPECTUS

Dependent Variable:

The purpose of this phase is to carefully record the decisions taken into a comprehensive prospectus which is inclusive of:

1. a descriptive statement of the process through which a decision was taken as well as an identification of those persons responsible for the decisions.

2. a statement of current facts that reveal the social and economic situation within the designated areas.

3. statements of the significant needs of people.

4. statements of educational objectives designed to meet the needs.

5. an indication of possible means for helping people satisfy these needs.

Independent Variables:

The extent to which the above is achieved will be a function of the following:

1. the adequacy of factual information considered by the planners in arriving at program decisions.

2. the relevancy of problems identified by the planners.

3. the appropriateness of objectives defined.

4. the degree to which the professional staff are able to successfully summarize the planners' decisions (deliberations).

Decisions taken by planners are meaningless unless they are effectively translated into a blueprint for action. Such a blueprint becomes a prospectus to guide the efforts of both professional and lay leaders over an extended period of time in planning for and effecting change.

The adequacy of the program prospectus will be a reflection of the decisions cooperatively made by both the lay and professional leadership. These decisions will be related to the adequacy of the background information and also to the manner in which this information was analyzed and interpreted.

The actual development of the written program statement is considered by most program experts as being the responsibility of the professionals. Nevertheless, the professional staff must be capable of capturing the real deliberations of the planners. The successful performance of the task necessitates considerable interaction between professional and lay leaders.

Ideally, the program prospectus serves as a means for establishing a common core of expectations as to outcomes both for the professional staff and the organization's clientele. It also serves as the general framework within which the everyday efforts of the staff and lay leadership are effectively related to major and minor problematic situations.

PHASE VI - DEVELOPING A PLAN FOR IMPLEMENTING DECISIONS TAKEN BY PLANNERS AND WHICH ARE INCORPORATED IN THE PROGRAM PROSPECTUS

Dependent Variable:

The task is to prepare (design) an effective educational plan for treating problems encompassed in the program prospectus within a reasonable time schedule.

Independent Variables:

The following factors are important in developing an educational plan(s) for coping with problems contained in the program:

1. staff members' levels of proficiency with respect to designing effective learning experiences that consider:

   a. the people affected,

   b. how people learn, and

   c. subject matter.

2. the manner in which learning experiences are organized.

3. the degree to which resources persons are identified for specific responsibilities.

4. the degree to which provisions are made for coordinating the efforts of resource persons.

5. the degree to which educational plans are related to the program prospectus.

It is practically impossible to deal with all of the problems in the program prospectus within a year, or for that matter, to completely solve long-range problems. Many problem situations outlined in the program prospectus are highly complex and interrelated and may require several years of continuous and concentrated effort by the change agents before an effective solution can be reached. Professional change agents must be able to diagnose a problematic situation and identify specific problems contained therein and the causal factors.

The findings obtained from the diagnosis constitute the basis for the development of specific educational plans and ultimately an overall plan of work. The development of an effective plan of work requires that change agents possess a thorough understanding of concepts associated with the change process and a high degree of proficiency in applying these concepts. The cumulative effects of several educational plans focused on a problematic situation and implemented over an appropriate time period should result in measurable impact.

The development of a plan of work requires that resource persons (Adult Educators) be identified to assume responsibility for various aspects of the plan. This important component may serve as a leverage for facilitating coordination within the professional staff. In identifying possible resource persons, ample opportunity must be provided for staff interaction in order to help them acquire an understanding of what resources will be needed to carry out the educational job and further to obtain from them a commitment.

A major test confronting change agents in the final analysis is that of effectively relating the plan(s) of work to the program prospectus. Unless such a relationship is firmly established and understood, the chances are that the efforts of the change agents will not be effectively focused on major problematic situations. Decisions have to be made as to where change agents should commence their work, and also concerning points where emphasis should be redirected. Hence, professional change agents must be able to perceive a problematic situation in its totality and also be proficient in identifying specific problems encompassed in the situation.

PHASE VII - IMPLEMENTING THE PLAN

Dependent Variable:

The aim at this phase is to effectively implement the educational plan(s) and, hence, the program.

Independent Variables:

The identification and discussion of all the variables related to high performance in the dependent variable of this phase would be tantamount to explicating from all of the writing of human behavior that which is most relevant to instigating social change. Recognizing this as beyond the scope of this paper, the following are suggested as some of the variables related to successful action (implementation):

1. the ability of professional educators and others considered to establish common understanding among persons to be affected by the plan(s).

2. the ability of professional educators to identify the educational tasks contained within the plans, and to further define the means for their accomplishment.

3. the identification of resource persons and the type of commitment obtained from these persons.

4. the degree to which resource persons are equipped for their responsibilities.

5. the establishment of an effective communications network among those who are involved in carrying our various tasks.

6. the ability of the professional staff and resource persons to follow up on tasks underway or action taken.

Program action is the process of carrying through on planned educational jobs outlined in the educational plan. The degree of success in program action will be highly related to the ability of the professional staff to utilize the various principles of social action.

The techniques of putting a written plan into action require excellence in bringing performance of staff and leaders up to potential and also in creating productive working relationships. Professionals and lay leaders must take the lead in helping relevant persons develop a common understanding of the jobs that need to be carried out. They must provide opportunities for leaders and others to contribute ideas that will be useful in implementing planned educational jobs. A special attempt needs to be made to help resource persons (both professional, semi-professional and lay leaders) acquire a thorough understanding of what is expected of them with respect to the various jobs.

Technical training in subject matter and educational methodology must be provided those who are responsible for carrying out specific educational jobs. Too, opportunities must be provided for continual review and follow-up by the professional staff and leaders.

PHASE VIII - PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Dependent Variable:

The primary purpose at this phase is to appraise the results attained through the implementation of the educational plan (3) and to effectively relate results to the objectives enunciated in the plan, the program prospectus, and the overall objectives of the complex adult education organization.

Independent Variables:

The degree to which accomplishments can be determined and related to the several levels of objectives will be related to the following:

1. clarity of objectives established at the several levels.
2. the development and organization of learning experiences appropriate to effecting the behavioral change(s) specified in the objectives.
3. the adequacy of initial benchmarks from which to measure change.
4. the reliability and validity of the measures which are developed.
5. the ability of professional educators and lay leaders to interpret evidence in relation to objectives.

This phase involves a more general approach to overall evaluation of the entire educational program. Results must be evaluated in relation to stated objectives. Concern should be given not only to those areas where stated objectives were not satisfactorily achieved, but also to recognition and satisfaction with these goals that were successfully accomplished. The amount judged to be satisfactory must be determined in light of the potential for improvement, the complexities of problem(s), the objectives and resources available.

In addition to evaluating objectives accomplished, evaluation should also be made of what is called process. By process is meant how the program was carried out -- committee systems, human relations, skills, conflicts, group relations developed, problems encountered, effectiveness of learning experiences provided, etc.

Some Sociological Aspects of Programming in the Complex Adult Education Organization Reiterated

Although the sociological aspects of programming (decision-making) has been emphasized throughout the previous parts of this paper, the purpose of this concluding section is to re-emphasize these aspects. Programming (decision-making) is viewed as a rational and purposive process leading to a decision. The process is applicable to both individuals and groups. It has psychological, sociological and situational aspects.

Inherent within the process are a number of orderly and interrelated steps (activities) -- the successive and effective implementation of which is deemed essential in arriving at sound and rational decisions. These steps suggest a number of tasks that must be performed by the individual(s) or group. The degree to which these tasks are performed may be influenced by a number of factors -- some of which are the personal characteristics of the individual, the behavior of the individual, the kind and degree of interaction between individuals within the group, the status-roles of individuals within the group, and the homogenity or heterogenity of the group. The lack of adequate research concerning the effect of these factors on the programming or decision-making process forces one to do much speculating at this point.

Since the major focus of this paper was devoted to a discussion of programming in the complex adult education organization, it seems important that the sociological aspects of the process treated in this context be reiterated. Although several of these aspects are peripheral to the topic -- nevertheless they will be briefly discussed. Programming (decision-making) pervades every level of the organization. It is through the programming (decision-making) process that the resources of the organization are effectively utilized in attaining its objectives.

Because of the ubiquitious nature of programming (decision-making), occurring as it does at all levels in the organization, it is apparent that it may be influenced by a number of individual or interrelated factors. Although research is inconclusive, there is reason to speculate that the clarity with which the general social system (objectives, means, role, authority, etc.) is delineated and understood by those within the system has a considerable bearing on the nature of program decisions taken. Too, the extent to which sub-systems identify with the general system also may have considerable import on the types of decisions taken within their context and the extent to which such decisions are interrelated and complement each other. Since clarity, understanding, and acceptance are so important at this point, opportunities must be provided for continuous and frequent interaction among and between staff groups -- both vertically and horizontally. This suggests that an understanding of the social action process by responsible persons in the organization is essential.

Since the major function of the complex adult education organization is to effect behavioral changes in the people (its clientele), it must effectively relate its resources to the needs of people. The active involvement of those in the programming process is thought to be a major determinant of success. Again, an understanding by change agents of the principles of social action is extremely important, if change is to be effected. Because of the complexity of problems, the number of people affected by these problems, and the limited resources of the change organization, effective groups of leaders at the operational level must be formed and maintained to assume major responsibility for planning, implementing and evaluating program decisions. There has been very little research oriented specifically at testing hypotheses and developing generalizations and principles that could be applied to group formation and maintenance of lay groups. Decision-making (programming), also pervades each of these functions -- planning, execution and evaluation.

These are but a few of the sociological aspects of programming (decision-making). It is obvious from this sketchy discussion that the programming phenomenon is an extremely complex one, but is one that merits much study. Perhaps the greatest need we have in researching the programming (decision-making) process is for improved methodology and theory. Analytical frameworks are needed to help guide our observations; improved measuring instruments will help us measure more rigorously the phenomena we observe.

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